



Summer 2025

LOVE & BELONGING

A new Academy member stands at a cutting board in the culinary team, staring down a head of broccoli. She's never actually cut broccoli before. It should be simple, right? For a moment, she's frozen in fear. A more experienced member is at the workstation next to her. He senses her apprehension and asks, "Want me to show you how?" Her shoulders visibly soften, and her heart rate slows. And this is how connection begins.

From broccoli florets, the conversation flows to music and then to movies, travel, and places they've lived, and they discover that they have a lot in common. This is how it grows. The work at the Academy serves several purposes. From culinary to graphic arts to welcome desk reception, it makes our mission possible. Perhaps more importantly, it also serves as a vehicle for members to rediscover the wonder of community, make friends and feel a sense of belonging.

If you're familiar with Maslow's Hierarchy of Needs, then you know that there are few things more imperative to our well-being than belonging and love. And yet, there is an epidemic of loneliness in our modern culture. Connections can be tough to make in adulthood for any of us. Add factors such as social anxiety, depression or other mental health challenges and it becomes increasingly difficult to create these life-affirming relationships.

At the Academy, our pursuit of the 8-Dimensions of Wellness ensures that we are also focusing on the need for



Working side-by-side and developing friendships.

social opportunities, even as we work side-by-side. From cooking meals to creating videos, the collaborative nature of our work provides a non-pressured opportunity for relationships to flourish naturally.



Building a sense of belonging during the Memorial Day holiday social at the Ringling Museum of Art.

The impact of belonging is rooted in science. Myriad studies show that social isolation can lead to unfavorable outcomes, exacerbate mental health challenges, undermine physical health, and sometimes result in shorter life spans. By contrast, friendships and connections can improve resilience, increase self-esteem, and promote a greater sense of happiness.

In the words of Academy member, Deborah Bifulco, "I love being here, I feel like I belong. It makes me feel good because we get together as a community, work together and support each other. And that's what I feel is the greatest gift of all."



Working together to learn coding.



The Academy at Glengary

AcademySRQ.org

VALUES-BASED

Values inspire our journey and guide the pathway to recovery.

ONE COMMUNITY, TWO CAMPUSES

In 2015, when our Sarasota campus was nothing but vacant land, we envisioned a place where we might create community, foster human connection, and nurture a sense of belonging. Beyond construction blueprints, what really mattered would be the culture created within our buildings – the way we anticipated relating to each other, and the love and support we hoped to share.

This past spring, we celebrated two anniversaries: the 8th year anniversary of Academy at Glengary and the 1st year anniversary of Academy at Bradenton. Our expansion into Manatee County was more than the creation of a second location – it was the expansion of our Academy community. Internally, we coined the phrase “one community, two campuses” to better express the intentions of our mission. We do not let geography or county lines divide us. Academy members have the opportunity, at their choosing, to attend either campus on any given day. In addition, you will often see staff back and forth between locations, depending on the responsibilities at hand.

We are all aware of the social isolation some experience during holidays and weekends. That's where community comes into play. To cultivate a sense of belonging beyond our Monday – Friday, 9am – 5pm, vocational activities, the Academy offers evening, weekend, and holiday socials. We hold pizza & movie nights on Thursdays, cultural events on weekends, and holiday celebrations of the actual day. (By the way, we held a big celebration on July 4th for members, families, and friends). Our after-hours and holiday gatherings are open to all Academy members, from both counties.

I recently encountered Academy member Irene Lunt at our Bradenton campus. Irene moved from Sarasota to Manatee County earlier this

year and, due to the transportation barriers to Academy at Glengary, she began attending Academy at Bradenton. While many of our members identify employment or educational goals, Irene identifies community as her main strength and interest. And wow is she good at it! She's like a multiplier effect, spreading love, belonging, and a sense of joy when she walks through our doors.

Irene shared this: “I enjoy being around people, and I like working in all the teams. The Academy is a great place to make friends. My life feels more positive since becoming a member. I would tell anyone to come here if they have a mental health diagnosis and want to connect with a wonderful community and improve their lives.”

William McKeever

Director

*Irene Lunt
poses with
William
McKeever
at Academy at
Bradenton.*



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OUR AMBASSADORS

The Academy Ambassadors fill a vital role by sharing our mission and helping us build strong roots in the community.

COMMUNITY • WORK • QUALITY • FRIENDSHIP • RESPECT • WELLNESS





Danica Willis

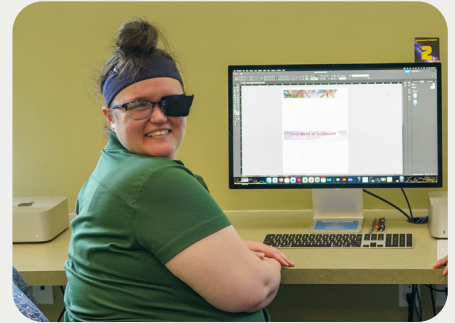
MEET DANICA

For much of my life I've dealt with serious health issues. I had brain cancer at 16, a blood clot at 32, and I've dealt with major depression and anxiety on top of all that. It has not been an easy road. I also suffered from very low self-esteem and social paralysis. I used to be so shy that I wouldn't speak. I made myself so unapproachable that I convinced myself that I was invisible.

My sister had toured the Academy and was excited for me to check it out. By that time, isolation had gotten so intense that, even though I was always very introverted, I became hungry for social interaction. There could not have been a kinder, gentler place to dip my toe in the water of community.

So first, the Academy activates my brain every day. I work in the Graphic Design team and I love to be creative by making outreach cards, designing the daily menu, formatting the newsletters. I collaborate with other members and the staff and I feel... worthy. Maybe that's a weird way to explain it but I never thought my voice belonged in the conversation before. It's the way people respond to me here. They accept and appreciate me. They like my ideas. I've always struggled with low self-esteem, I felt like I had to change myself for people to like me. But now I've found a place where I can unapologetically be myself, and it's enough.

“But now I've found a place where I can unapologetically be myself, and it's enough.”



Gerry Zago

MEET GERRY

I'm a quiet guy but a man of service. As an Academy member, I have been a dependable and consistent member, working in both the Culinary and Business & Technology teams. I am always looking for ways to be of service, whether it's helping to make lunch, typing up meeting notes, or jumping up to open a door for someone. When I first moved to Florida, I knew no one and I didn't know where to go. Finding the Academy has given me a sense of belonging that I craved, and I pay it forward to help make others feel as safe as I do here.

The Culinary team affords opportunities to socialize with others while we work, and that's where I met my closest friends. Live music has always been a big part of my life but for years, I didn't have anyone who wanted to go to concerts with me. That all changed when I joined the Academy! I've found so much common ground with other members. Now, not only do I have the Academy to fill my days with work, but I often have plans on the weekends with friends!

I got my first job in high school as a sandwich maker at Au Bon Pain. I worked steadily for years until my illness made it too difficult for me. I'm happy to say that, for the first time in twenty years, I am excited to go back to work. The Academy is helping me reach my goals, and they remind me every day that I am capable of fulfilling my dreams. I am proud to belong to such a positive and supportive community!

“The Academy is helping me reach my goals...”



SS • SERVICE • KINDNESS • PURPOSE • ACCEPTANCE • STRUCTURE



CELEBRATING EIGHT YEARS!

Some of us remember when the Academy at Glengary was just a glint in our eye. How quickly time passes! Members, staff, families, community partners, dignitaries and board members came together to celebrate eight years of fun, community, and transformation. We thank everyone who has been part of this journey!



ACADEMY IS ON A ROLL

We purchased a beautiful new 2025 Kia Carnival, thanks to the generosity of the Matches Giving Circle of the Manatee Community Foundation (MCF). It will provide transportation assistance to Academy at Bradenton. Academy member Jaquez Fisher shared his story to the Giving Circle, "I had a wonderful time meeting people at MCF and expressing myself. Thank you for believing in us."



RAISING PUBLIC AWARENESS

We love the opportunity to share our mission with our local community. Erika Schlunk and Vanessa Alcantara recently had the opportunity to present to the Bradenton Kiwanis Club. As Erika stated, "Sharing my story was so meaningful to me. They couldn't have cheered my success at the Academy any louder, with one Kiwanis member offering a "You go girl!"



CO-HOSTING WORLD SEMINAR 2025

In partnership with the Florida Clubhouse Coalition, the Academy co-hosted the Clubhouse International World Seminar 2025 in St. Pete Beach. Academy members Joshua Posada and Justin Gee gave plenary speeches to over 650 attendees.



Want to learn more?

The first step is to take a tour!

Families, applicants and community providers are welcome.

To schedule a tour or for more information, please call:

Academy at Bradenton, 601 12th St., W., Bradenton - 941-929-2800

Academy at Glengary, 1910 Glengary St., Sarasota - 941-921-9930

or email Info@AcademySRQ.org

Hours: Monday - Friday, 9 a.m. to 5 p.m.

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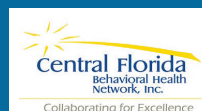
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